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Hope Floats (and Twitches, and Shimmies)



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Photo: Joe Pugliese

Choreographer Kim G. goes behind bars to get California's inmates dancing. SUSAN MORGAN reports on the West Coast woman who takes all prisoners—and offers them release.

Interstate 10 through the California desert is a long, straight stretch of shimmering highway. Tractor-trailers roar through the heat, and signs warn motorists against stopping for hitchhikers. Set back from the road is a prison complex ringed by palm trees and electric fences, a harsh oasis in an already unwelcoming landscape. For Los Angeles-based choreographer and dancer Kim G., however, this has become a regular destination on an unanticipated route. Since 1994, when Ms. G. (originally

Gildart) created her Movement Works Project, she has been an itinerant artist, traveling to teach creative dance classes within the California Department of Corrections and the state's juvenile justice system.

The workshop—her own fusion of dance, yoga, storytelling, and theater—takes place in a room with a concrete floor and corrugated-tin ceiling, the kind of space you might find at any public college or recreation center. Wooden easels have been temporarily pushed to one side, and as Kim G. limbers up, she shuffles with DJ deftness through her stack of CDs—a selection ranging from the placid samplings of A Tribe Called Quest to what she describes as "the souped-up chanting" of Krishna Das.

With the state's prison population now hovering around 160,000—equivalent to roughly half the number of residents in the capital city of Sacramento—there is an ever-ready supply of inmates to motivate.

Could a creative dance workshop truly prompt criminals to reform? "I think there are incredibly compassionate people with rehabilitation skills that I don't have," says Kim G. "But one thing I can do for prisoners is pull them into the present moment. And, at least for that moment, I hope it's healing."

What You Can Do

- **If you want to help prisoners:** The Alternatives to Violence Project offers workshops on personal growth and conflict resolution in prisons, communities, and schools. To volunteer you must undergo training by taking three of the organization's workshops. Visit the project's Web site at www.AVPUSA.org to find out about your local chapter.
- **If you want to support female inmates who have children:** Family and Corrections Network is the first national organization in the United States to focus on the families of offenders. Log on to

www.fcnetwork.org to get information on programs around the country that need volunteers to mentor and provide other services for the children of inmates.

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